

# Institute for Mental Health Research

<http://www.imhr.org/>

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## **Overview**

### **Vision**

The Institute for Mental Health Research is creating a research center where preeminent scientists can collaborate to set the world standard for mental health care, research, prevention, and the promotion of mental health. IMHR is starting this process by establishing interdisciplinary teams of scientists and clinicians from psychiatry, psychology, social work, and fields as diverse as genetic engineering, psychopharmacology, neuroscience, nanotechnology, molecular biology, bioengineering, medical anthropology, ethics, law, management, and business to engage in basic laboratory research, clinical studies, and health systems evaluations. These professionals are being recruited to Arizona through partnerships with universities and bioscience research organizations.

### **Goals**

The Institute is focusing on four areas based on Arizona's existing strengths and the identified needs of those with mental illness:

- Child and adolescent mental health is several decades behind that of its adult counterpart. A critical mass of talented, productive researchers is needed to advance studies and bridge the existing gap.
- Little information exists about the psychiatric aspects of gross brain disease and injury. Patients who experience stroke, head trauma, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, and other brain-injuring pathologies suffer more than motor, speech, and sensory deficits. They also typically experience changes in mood, personality, thinking, and the ability to experience pleasure.
- People with schizophrenia consume a higher proportion of hospital bed days than any other mental illness. A significant percentage of these patients are cared for by the public sector. There is a critical need to improve diagnosis and treatment of these individuals.
- Approximately 10% of the U.S. population meet the criteria for major depression at some time during a 12-month period. Expanded research efforts, imaging resources, and personnel are necessary to more effectively address this widespread illness.

### **Research Focus**

Basic science and clinical studies that investigate the causes, diagnosis, and treatment of mental disorders are the Institute's primary goals. The initial focus of the Institute's work will be on research and development in mental health, basic neuroscience, and clinical neuroscience. The scientific investigations will use the tools of molecular and cellular biology, genetics, epidemiology, and cognitive and behavioral science.

With the completion of the human genome project, researchers now have the ability to map human genes responsible for these disorders or for placing an individual at risk for developing a disorder. The identity of aberrant human genes and the protein that each of these genes is responsible for making can become a new therapeutic target, the basis for new drug development, and new treatment strategies. Neuro-imaging and anatomical studies will complement the molecular and biochemical

studies in the quest to understand how the brain functions. These investigations will help in resolving how the brain is organized in normal individuals versus those with specific mental disorders.

In parallel with the basic research studies, clinical research trials will determine the best use of available treatments and treatment combinations. In order to improve on our current practices in treating mental illness, we need to have a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence brain function and behavior. The function of the Institute is to establish collaborative interactions between the basic scientist and the academic physician to increase the focus on "translational research" whereby basic and clinical scientists are involved in joint efforts to translate discoveries and knowledge into clinically relevant questions and targets that might be used for new therapeutic strategies. Translational research holds the promise for disentangling the complex causes of mental disorders and for advancing the development of more effective treatments for both children and adults.

Institute funding will supplement three key areas to support advances in mental health research -- specific equipment, research infrastructure, and ascertainment of a critical mass of investigators dedicated to a specific disorder. Based on the strengths already existing in Arizona and the identified needs of those with a mental illness, the Institute will seek to expand mental health research initially in child and adolescent mental health, brain disease and injury, schizophrenia, and depression.

### **Educational Symposiums**

- Mental Health Disparities in the Hispanic Population 1/4/03
- The Destigmatization of Mental Illness 11/21/03

### **Research Partners**

- University of Arizona
- St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center / Barrow Neurological Institute
- Arizona State University
- Banner Health System
- Sun Health Research Institute
- TGen

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